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ABSTRACT

Erving Goffman has made significant, sustained contributions to the understanding of human behavior. Goffman studied the minute details of human interaction and how social arrangements protect and promote those interactions. Central to Goffman's study of human interaction was the concept of "self." Goffman believed that the self has two parts: "official" and "all-too-human." Both selves are communicated by interpersonal means, where individuals choose clothing, mannerisms, and speech to influence the outcome of conversations and interactions with others. Goffman's theoretical perspective, his use of "incongruent phrases," and his practice of "serious ethnography" or "ethnomethodology" are useful concepts and research techniques for the rhetoric and communication scholar. His methods have been called empirical, but were not based on quantification--a radical stance for his time. His primary research goal was to show that the behavior considered to be common is really uncommon, when viewed from different perspectives. Goffman has attempted to avoid being classified along any one theoretical line or associated with any particular school of thought. The ability to articulate the subtle implications of how society is maintained is a powerful part of Goffman's work. At the same time, however, Goffman understood that he was a part of what he was studying, that his mere presence had an impact on how people behaved, and that the situation in which the episode occurs influences its meaning. Communication reality is a symbolic reality that is held together, because people believe it is that way. (Thirty-eight footnotes are included.) (RAE)

THE UTILITY OF ERVING GOFFMAN'S THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE, METAPHORICAL MODELS, AND "SERIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY" FOR THE RHETORIC AND COMMUNICATION SCHOLAR

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INTRODUCTION

Erving Goffma has made significant, sustained contributions to the understanding of human behavior. Although he was a sociologist , his works have had an impact on other fields such as psychology, anthropology, and, to a lesser extent, communication. Goffman, who studied at the University of Chicago under the famous symbolic interactionist Herbert Blumer, "opened to scholarly inquiry (and also for the instruction of interested laymen) an area of behavior that had been considered too commonplace to be of significance."[1] The area of behavior that Goffman studied was the minute details of human interaction and how social arrangements protect and promote those interactions.[2]

Central to Goffman's study of human interaction was the concept of "self." Much of why we communicate and attempt to persuade others is to maintain our appearance of self. Goffman believed that the self has two parts: "official" and "all-to human." Goffman describes the "official" self in this way:

> The self ... can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the persons to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special

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[1] The Annual Obituary 1982, New York, 1982, St. Martin's Press, p. 550.

[2] Ibid.

kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it.[3]

The "all-too-human" self, on the other hand, is the self we show when we are not performing for others, the self we show in the "back regions" (e.g., a waiter acts differently when in front of customers [official self] than when talking to the cook [all-to human self]). Both selves are communicated by interpersonal means, where individuals choose clothing, mannerisms, and speech to influence the outcome of conversations and interactions with others.

Many of Goffman's works, methods of inquiry, and perspectives are relevant to the field of rhetoric and communication and some applications of his ideas have already occurred.[4] In his no less than twenty-seven books and articles, Goffman has discovered many of the ways that we communicate, both verbally and nonverbally, when in the presence of others. In my view, Goffman should be considered more seriously by the rhetoric and communication scholar for two reasons. First, many of his ideas provide frameworks to study human communication. He has developed extensive classification systems for various types of

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[3]Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1961, p. 168.

[4]See, for example, Appel, Edward. "The Perfected Drama of Rev. Jerry Falwell," Communication Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 1, Winter, 1987. Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L., and Towne, N. Interplay: The Process of Interpersonal Communication, Second Ed. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1983. Burgoon, J. and Saine, T. The Unspoken Dialogue: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1978.

communication situations. For example, with respect to conversational analysis, Goffman has suggested that we study this phenomena in "micro-units" (i.e., naturally bounded units, basic interaction units, concrete units of interaction, natural units of social organization, and members of a single natural class). He developed these concepts through tedious application and reapplication to conversations in the real world; he did not use the rules of deductive logic to create his system.[5] Questions about the utility of these concepts need to be asked by our field. To ignore the ideas about communication from such a significant scholar is not a wise practice. Therefore, just as the students of conversational analysis need to decide whether Goffman's classifications are useful to their respective purposes, other rhetoric and communication scholars should examine his works and see if Goffman's ideas benefit their studies.

The second reason we should take Goffman's more seriously, and the focus of this essay, is because of his interesting perspectives and research techniques. His methods have been called empirical, but not based on quantification--a radical stance for his time. He was an ethnomethodologists, whose primary research goal was to show that the behavior we consider to be common is really uncommon, when viewed by different perspectives. In other words, he used techniques that made the familiar appear unfamiliar, so that "real" understanding of human interaction

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[5]Williams, Robin. "Goffman's Sociology of Talk," in Ditton Jason, The View From Goffman. St. Martin's Press, 1980, p. 211.

could be determined. My argument in this paper is that Goffman's perspective, use of metaphorical statements and models, and belief in "serious ethnography" are useful to the rhetoric and communication scholar. Specifically, I shall first look his theoretical tradition, sources of data, theoretical allegiance, and reasons for being against laboratory experiments. Many of the assumptions about human behavior and the approaches that he used to study behavior were influenced by his mentors. Second, I shall explore his use of a "perspective of incongruity" as a technique for getting at the "taken for granted." Goffman found that by using metaphorical statements and creating metaphorical models, he could shake the readers present understanding of human interaction. Third, I shall look at his method of inquiry, ethnomethodology, and briefly discuss how he and others have used this method for studying human interaction. At the end of each section, I will suggests how his ideas and techniques can be applied to the field of rhetoric and communication.

GOFFMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Theoretical Tradition:

Goffman comes from a "power-house" tradition, presently known as symbolic interactionism, where field research is favored over both laboratory studies and "armchair" writing. The father of symbolic interactionism is George Herbert Mead, who drew upon the works of William James, Charles Cooley, John Dewey, and I. A. Thomas. At the center of Mead's thinking was the belief that individuals and society are inseparable and interdependent. We

are able to have a society because of shared symbols. And, as Goffman proved through much of his research, those symbols are changing and unstable, therefore, society is not fixed and and permanent. The symbolic interactionist, then, is interested in ways that individuals maintain those shared symbols when they come together.

Sources of Data:

Because the natural context, where individuals communicate and share symbols, is important, laboratory studies are insufficient. Blumer, one major figure who continued Mead's work, felt that important information about individuals could be obtained through direct observations, interviewing, listening in on conversations, surveying life histories, reading letters and diaries, and consulting public records to make sense of our symbolic world. A quick glance at any of Goffman's works proves that he uses these techniques extensively. For example, in the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman states:

> The illustrative materials used in this study are of mixed status: some are taken from respectable researchers where qualified generalizations are given concerning reliably recorded regularities; some are taken from informal memoirs written by colorful people; many fall in between.[6]

Clearly, Blumer had an impact on Goffman's research philosophy.

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[6]Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1959, preface.

Theoretical Allegiance:

Goffman, however, has attempted to avoid being classified along any one theoretical line or associated with any particular school of thought (i.e., semiotics, structuralism, Marxism, etc.), "feeling this activity turned [him] away from rather than toward the study of society."[7] At one point, when he was "labeled" a "structuralist" by two critics, he thought that this was a crude form of stereotyping and responded with razor-sharp comments:

> One proclaims one's membership in some named perspective, gives pious mention of its central texts, and announces that the writer under review is all off by virtue of failing to qualify for membership. A case of guilt by pigeonholing. As if a writer's work is a unitary thing and can be all bad because he or she does not apparently subscribe to a particular doctrine, which doctrine, if subscribed to, would somehow make writings good. This vested interest in treating an individual's diverse efforts as a succinctly characterizable corpus supports a crude fallacy: That at any current moment in his working life, the true nature and purpose of his doings can be unmasked, reconstituting how they are to be correctly understood, and predicting what can only come of them hereafter.[8]

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[7]Lofland, John. "Erving Goffman's Sociological Legacies," Urban Life, Vol. 13, No. 1, April, 1984, p. 11.

[8]Goffman, Erving. "Reply," Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 10, January, 1981, p. 61.

Clearly, as many critics of Goffman's works have articulated, he resisted being classified. Instead, making "students" of human behavior see situations in new ways is what was important in his research, not clarifying, reworking, or rehashing what had already been said by someone else.

Reasons for Being Against Laboratory Experiments:

Although Goffman and Blumer opposed laboratory experiments, Goffman's reasons were different. He was critical of these studies of social interaction, not because these studies had no relevance outside the laboratory, but because:

> Fields of naturalistic study have not been uncovered through these methods. Concepts have not emerged that reorder our view of social activity. Frameworks have not been established into which a continuously larger number of facts can be placed. Understanding of ordinary behavior has not accumulated; distance has.[9]

In addition, Goffman was critical of laboratory studies because "good" hypotheses are often revised in order to accommodate cases that are negative. He states:

> If one has a really nice hypothesis, why not reverse the prescribed procedure and look for the category of social life that beautifully fits it?
>
> Further, if one get hold of a hypothesis that elegantly accounts for a good share of instances, one may be loathe to

[9]Goffman, Erving. Relations in Public. Basic Books, New York, 1971, p. xvi.

> throw it over for some plodding brute, all for the love of a few negative cases. Better perhaps to reexamine the negative cases or provide a special category for them; certainly it would be wise to wait for a while, as did those who had pretty but inadequate theories of light, before junking one's hypothesis. There are lots of facts, but a good theory is hard to find, partly because it must do so much more than merely fit them. We social scientists are too much awed by what we feel the history of the physical sciences should have been, and too little influenced by what it actually was.[10]

For Goffman, these two draw backs of laboratory studies keep the researcher from seeing his subject in new and interesting ways.

Application to the Field of Rhetoric and Communication:

The rhetoric and communication scholar can learn much from Goffman's ideas and comments about theoretical perspectives and research. First, when we begin to investigate a phenomena, we will have to decide which method is best? Some will want to tests hypotheses in a statistical fashion, but as Goffman has argued and demonstrated, much can be learned by not doing experimental studies. (Note: His specific research techniques are discussed later in this essay.) Second, theoretical purity or allying oneself with one school of thought may not serve us well. Delia has argued that we need to stay with one school of thought, because, when we use an eclectic approach, we necessarily violate

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[10]Goffman, Erving. "Review of D. R. Cressey, Other People's Money," Psychiatry, Vol. 20, August, 1957, p. 323.

and mix assumptions of those perspectives.[11] Goffman, on the other hand, suggests that we look at the phenomena in the most creative way possible, without worrying whether we are a constructivists, symbolic interactionists, rules theorists, logical positivists, and so on. Third, Goffman makes it quite clear that scholars should be doing research, not "armchair" writing. I strongly agree with his assertion.[12] All too often, it seems that rhetoric and communication scholars prefer to write critiques of what someone has said and decide whether what was said agrees with Aristotle or some other figure. What would be more beneficial is to use what others have said an see if it helps us better understand persuasion. Finally, Goffman makes a brilliant point about negative cases in hypothesis testing: hypotheses are thrown out too often, because they do not accommodate negative cases. One rhetoric scholar, Rod Hart, articulates the bias toward negative cases that we all seem to have:

> Since that theory is best which can account for the greatest number of negative instances, analysts might focus their attention on the commonplace (oftentimes mundane components of rhetorical life. While the Speech Communication Association is encouraging scholars in the

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[11]Delia, Jessie. "Alternative Perspectives for the Study of Human Communication: Critique and Response," in Frank Dance, Ed., Human Communication Theory. Harper and Row, New York, 1982, p. 147-191.

[12]And believe that this essay is in compliance with Goffman's views.

> field to study a series of rhetorical events which occur but once every four years (that is, the presidential campaign of 1976), too few of us are studying the sorts of public talk which occur day in and day-out. Presently, we are not studying the rhetoric of plumbers' conventions, the proselytizing which occurs at meetings of the Catholic War Veterans, the dialectic at the local city council meeting, and the hundreds of thousands of other instances of public rhetoric which affect us all so ubiquitously and so immediately, albeit so ordinarily.[13]

Although Hart's goal for better understanding persuasion are admirable, he, like many of us, demonstrates a bias toward accommodating negative cases. Hart's solution is to study phenomena that occur more frequently. Goffman's suggestion is to make a new category for the negative case or, at least, wait a while before we throw out a good theory.

PERSPECTIVE OF INCONGRUITY

In his early works (i.e., 1950s and 1960s), Goffman used a technique similar to that of Kenneth Burke's "perspective by incongruity." Goffman took words or phrases from one setting and applied them to another, thus, creating metaphorical statements. As Aristotle has suggested, the choice of metaphor is extremely important, because some metaphors can be too ridiculous, grand, or

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[illegible], Roderick. "Theory-Building and Rhetorical Criticism," Central States Speech Journal. Vol. 27, 1976, p. 72.

far-fetched.[14] Goffman chose his metaphors carefully and used them in two ways.[15] First, he "sprinkled" the text with incongruous phrases, which were designed to jolt the reader or show the irony of a situation. For example, Goffman made incongruous phrases such as "universal human nature is not a very human thing"[16] and "the world, in truth, is a wedding."[17] Through these phrases, he attempted to show the reader that our assumptions about human interaction are more complex than we first imagined. Second, he used metaphors to form an entire incongruous model of society. For example, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman applies the theatrical metaphor to human behavior:

> Social life is viewed in terms of performers and teams who utilize front and back regions to foster an impression on an audience. Persons are seen as performers of characters.[18]

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[14]Aristotle. Rhetoric, Book III, 1406b-5. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Random House, Inc., 1954.

[15]Lofland, John. "Early Goffman: Style, Structure, Substance, Soul," in Ditton, Jason, Ed. The View From Goffman. St. Martin's Press, 1980, p. 25.

[16]Goffman, Erving. "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction," Psychiatry, Vol 18, No. 3, p. 231.

[17]Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1959, p. 36.)

[18]Goffman, Erving. Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1959.

Other examples include viewing persons as "ritually sacred objects"[19] and describing a patient's stay at in a mental hospital as a "career."[20]

Why does Goffman use metaphors or incongruous phrases?

Contrary to what Aristotle has said (i.e., metaphor is an ornamentation of language), Max Black and I. A. Richards have suggested that metaphors can argue. Goffman, by using metaphors, attempted to describe the "taken for granted situation" in a new light. The metaphor makes the familiar look unfamiliar. When we view the world as a stage where we constantly give performances, we begin to understand what is important in our interactions. We see that what we say is not always as important as how or where we say it. Or, in the words of the theater, our props, timing, and regions are paramount to a successful performance.

Application to the Field of Rhetoric and Communication:

Although some have quibbled with Goffman's use of metaphorical statements and suggested that they are confusing, the incongruous phrases are useful tools to help the rhetoric and communication scholar analyze human behavior in two ways. First, the rhetoric and communication scholar can use existing classifications developed by Goffman. Just as rhetorical criticisms have been based on Kenneth Burke's pentad, which attempts to describe a situation by answering five questions

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[19]Goffman, Erving. "The Nature and Deference and Demeanor," American Anthropologist, Vol. 58, June, pp. 473-502.

[20]Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1961.

(i.e., what was done [act], when or where it was done [scene], who did it [agent], how he did it [agency], and why [purpose]),[21] rhetorical criticisms could be conducted using Goffman's terminology. For example, when questions are ask about where an event occurred, answers could be categorized into front and back regions. The critic, understanding that different selves are presented in these regions, might have an easier time accounting for discrepancies in the actor's performance. A second application of Goffman's technique would be to create new metaphorical models for communication phenomena. Here, the rhetoric and communication scholar would be responsible for developing their own applications of incongruous statements to communication variables. For example, an encounter group might be compared to stopping at a gas station. Important parts of the process would be getting the right fuel (i.e., setting personal goals that you want the group to help you fulfill), checking the oil (i.e., examining feelings that you may not be aware of that, if go unchecked, may eventually destroy you), and paying the attendant (i.e., giving something of yourself back to the group). Just as Goffman used metaphorical statements to provide fresh insights in to social arrangements, so the rhetoric and communication scholar can use metaphorical models to view the subtle parts of the communication process.

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[21]Ling, David. "A Pentadic Analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy's Address to the People of Massachusetts, July 25, 1969," Central States Speech Journal, Vol. 21, No. 2, Summer, 1970, p. 81.

GOFFMAN AS A "SERIOUS ETHNOGRAPHER"

In addition to Goffman's use of metaphorical statements as a system of looking at the old in a new way, how else did he cause others to see what they had not seen? Always, he used a method of inquiry known as "serious ethnography" or "ethnomethodology." An ethnographer conducts studies that:

> explore the influence of peoples' standpoints (or perspective) on their thought and action in great detail. To explain why people act as they do, ethonomethodologists examine their physical and social circumstances, their habits and the habits of those around them, their background knowledge, and their practical motives.[22]

To find out the circumstances, habits, background knowledge, and practical motives of individuals during interaction, Goffman spent several years doing field work (Shetland Isles 1953, 1959 and St. Elizabeth's Hospital 1961). His major goal while using "serious ethnography" was to "identify the countless patterns and natural sequences of behavior occurring when persons come into one anothers' immediate presence."[23]

Lofland has suggested that Goffman admired linguists and ethologists more than sociologists, because they worked at serious ethnography.[24] Commenting about ethnologists, Goffman states:

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[22]Handel, W. Ethnomethodology: How People Make Sense. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1982, p. 4.
[23]Goffman, Erving. Interaction Ritual. Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1967, p. 2.
[24]Lofland, John. "Erving Goffman's Sociological Legacies," Urban Life, Vol. 13, No. 1, Paril 1984, p. 15.

> They have developed a field discipline that leads them to study animal conduct in very close detail and with a measure of control on preconception. In consequence, they have developed the ability to cut into the flow of apparently haphazard animal activity at its articulations and to isolate natural patterns. Once these behavioral sequences are pointed out to the observer, his seeing is changed.[25]

For Goffman, serious ethnography was the method he could use to make sense of "apparently haphazard" human activity and "isolate" our natural patterns.

Techniques of the Serious Ethnographer:

One of the first ethnomethodologists was Harold Garfinkel, who built on the "insights of the German social philosopher Alfred Schutz."[26] Garfinkel was famous for showing that "social structures exist only because people believe that they exist , and those beliefs can be successfully challenged by people with sufficient power or self-assurance to override attempted sanctions."[27] For example, I recently visited with a young lady who was a sales clerk for a local department store. She related a story to me about a man who came into the store and expected not to pay the price marked on a piece of clothing. The man tried to persuade three different clerks, before the manager was called over. Not only were the clerks shocked that he would not pay the

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[25]Goffman, Erving. Relations in Public. Basic Books, New York, 1971, p. xvii.

[26]Collins, Randall and Michael Makowsky. The Discovery of Society, Second Edition. Random House, New York, 1978, p. 232.

[27]Ibid., p. 233-234.

price marked, they quickly became angry and passed the customer along to another clerk. In the end, they finally charged the man what he wanted to pay--just to get him out of the store. Although it is unlikely that this person was a student of Garfinkel, this story confirms research conducted by him. Garfinkel found that "the price you see is the price you pay has force only because everyone expects it to be followed; most of its force comes from the fact that it is never challenged."[28]

Goffman understood the principles of the ethnomethodologists and used them in his research. By looking for inconsistencies in behavior of actors and what they were expected to do, he was able to articulate social norms. For example, musicians in the orchestra pit of a Broadway musical are expected to come to work on time, be properly dressed and rehearsed, and be attentive to the director. Goffman goes on to explain:

> Once the musical score of the particular show is learned, however, they find themselves with nothing to do and are, moreover, half hidden from those who expect them to be merely and fully musicians at work. In consequence, pit musicians, although physically immobilized, tend to wander from their work, surreptitiously exhibiting both a self and a world quite removed from the auditorium. By being careful about being seen, they may engage in writing letters or composing music, re-reading the classics, doing crossword puzzles, sending each other notes, playing chess with a set

[28]Ibid., p. 233.

> slid along the floor, or engaging in horseplay with water pistols. Obviously, when a musician with an earplug pocket radio suddenly startles the theater-goers in the front row by exclaiming, "Snider hit a homer!" he is not active in a capacity and a world that has been programmed for him--as audience complaints to the management attest.[29]

Goffman's, therefore, by looking at what happens when the musicians do not follow the social norms, is able to describe expected behaviors.

Concern with Objectivity:

The ability to articulate the subtle implications of how society is maintained (namely, by actors following roles that are prescribed by society) is a powerful part of Goffman's work. At the same time, however, Goffman, like all ethnomethodologists, made two major commitments in his research. First, he understood that he was part of what he was studying. He knew that his mere presence had an impact of how people behaved. Second, Goffman knew that "the situation in which the episode occurs influences its meaning."[30] For example, police officers may tolerate vulgar familiarity and back talk from people on skid row and not punish those people. However, if someone is watching the police officers, the same behavior is not tolerated and that person is punished for his or her actions. Therefore, the

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[29]Goffman, Erving. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, New York, 1961, pp. 187-188.

[30]Ibid., Handel, W., p. 40.

ethnomethodologists realizes that his method of investigation has its limitations and liabilities. In order to make "rigorous" observations, then, Goffman needed to always be aware of his impact on the phenomena he was observing.

Personal Attempts to Make His Observations More Rigorous:

In addition to these two major commitments, Goffman also used other personal techniques to make his observations more rigorous. First, he used words and phrases carefully in his everyday conversations. "At the moment-to-moment level of living, or thinking, and of talking, he was resisting and reconsidering virtually every conventional sequencing of words in the language."[31] His practice seemed to follow the suggestion of Burke: we ought "experimentally [to] wrench... apart all... molecular combinations of adjective and noun, substantive and verb."[32] Goffman did not want his insights to become dulled because of his word choice. Second, in relation to much of his work on conversational analysis, Goffman believed that the researcher must look at what goes on between individuals during conversations by breaking apart social interaction. In other words, he believed that conversations need to be broken into small units before they are studied. Similarities in the structure of these fragments are what is important, not so much the content of each individual message.[33] Therefore, breaking apart what he

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[31]Ibid., "Erving Goffman's Sociological Legacies," p. 15.
[32]Burke, Kenneth. Permanence and Change.
[33]For an excellent discussion of Goffman's contrabutions to conversational analysis see Williams, Robin. "Goffman's Sociology of Talk," A View From Goffman, Jason Ditton, Ed. St. Martin's

studied into micro-units allowed Goffman great detail in his observations. Finally, he made a "conscious effort to avoid the obvious, to avoid banality in his own work and in that of his colleagues."[34] Observations that did not provide conceptual advances to the understanding of human behavior were largely a waste of time.

Applications to the Field of Rhetoric and Communication:

The rhetoric and communication scholar can also benefit from the practices of the ethnomethodologists. Just as Goffman and Garfinkel looked for the assumptions that hold society together, the communication and rhetoric scholar can look for the assumptions that bond human communication. To get at these assumptions, we can, first, use the techniques of Garfinkel. By purposefully violating norms in everyday communication settings, we can begin to see how others expect us to behave. Also, we can use Goffman techniques, that is, describing situations were norms have been broken in order to determine the original assumptions individuals hold toward various communication situations. Research questions, such as, how do certain words of an organization affect its employees? What is it that we take for granted when we communicate with another individual? Do these assumptions cause poor communication? Answers will, undoubtedly, show that our communication reality is a symbolic reality that is held together, because people believe it is that way. Certainly, the master rhetorician knows that:

Press, 1980, pp. 210-232.

> From the merest encounter of stranger avoiding each other's eyes on the street, to the mightiest empire, human social order is ultimately a symbolic reality that exists only as long as it is generally believed in, and it changes as people struggle to shift those beliefs to their advantage.[35]

CONCLUSION

Although there are varied positive and negative reactions to Goffman's works, one cannot deny that he has made important contributions to the understanding of human behavior. Goffman's methods of analysis were never statistical, unlike many of his contemporaries. In addition, he rarely quoted existing literature from sociology, rather he chose to use examples from his observations, great scholars (such as Gregory Bateson, Kenneth Burke, and Emile Durkheim), and autobiographical material from individuals, who were not scholars. Of those who praise Goffman's work, Manning states it best:

> Substantively, stylistically and metaphorically, his writing capture the changing tone of American life. His conceptual approach, his use of metaphor and a literary method all contribute to the resonance of his work and to its essential ambiguity. Goffman's changing view of every day life indicates that his abiding concern is with problems of justice, power, and civility. His work, anything but a trivial or cynical exercise, shows just how fragile any

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[34]Ibid., "Erving Goffman's Sociological Legacies," p. 17.

social order is, and reveals the potential horror in a society where the appearance of civility is just that.[36]

In this essay, I have suggested that Goffman's theoretical perspective, his use of "incongruent phrases," and his practice of "serious ethnography" or "ethnomethodology" are useful concepts and research techniques for the rhetoric and communication scholar. In addition to these points, the rhetoric and communication scholar can benefit from many of Goffman's more specific discussions of social interaction, because much of his work is strongly related to the principles of rhetoric and communication. Future discussion and analysis of his works would be of benefit to our discipline.

Goffman was a great scholar. One observer went so far as to say that he was:

> The quintessential American theorist. In the same way that a Weber of a Habermas epitomizes a German theorist and a Durkheim or a Foucault a French theorist, ...Goffman is an Emerson, a James, a Dewey, or a Mead. Like them he bears a great disdain for theory-talk, but an abiding love for theory, for thought about the way the world works.[37]

Goffman was not so bold. Humorously describing the kind of sociology that he and other did, he remarked: "We are all just elegant bullshitters."[38]

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[35]Ibid., Collins, Randal and Michael Makowsky, p. 234.
[36]Manning, Peter. "The Decline of Civility: A Comment on Erving Goffman's Sociology."
[37]Ibid., "Erving Goffman's Sociological Legacies," p. 12.
[38]Ibid.